

Michigan House of Representatives  
Natural Resources Committee  
Written Testimony regarding  
**Support of House Bills 5255**  
1/29/16



Dear Committee Members,

We are writing to you, providing written testimony in regards to House bill 5255, before your committee for hearing February 2, 2016. Michigan Trout Unlimited enthusiastically supports this bill.

Our mission is to ensure the protection and enhancement of Michigan's coldwater fisheries and their habitats. Our public waters and the fisheries they support are cherished and utilized by approximately 1.4 million anglers per year, with the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest number of out-of-state anglers of any state in the country. The use of these fisheries annually generates over \$4.2 billion in economic activity, sustains, 38,000 jobs, and creates over \$287 million in state or local taxes. Commercial aquaculture development in this state puts these resources and this Michigan economy in direct and severe peril.

Much has been written on the risks and impacts of commercial net pen aquaculture in Michigan over the last year or so. From nutrient waste and pollution, to aquatic organism disease epidemics, domesticated stock escapement and interbreeding with wild fisheries, and many others – this industry poses significant risks and impacts with high likelihood to crush our public natural resources. Many of these modes of impacts are not preventable. Great Lakes commercial net pen fish farming CAN NOT be done today without impacts, and must not be allowed to commence.

Great Lakes net pen fish farming, would be the only form of livestock husbandry that does not have to manage its animal waste – and it would allow it on public property – public waters. Could you fathom considering allowing just 1,000 pigs to be raised on mesh rafts on the Great Lakes, with their feces dropping to the water un-collected? Could you fathom considering allowing 10,000 domestic turkeys to be raised on a State Park, with their feces spread in piles on the rest of the state park? This unchecked nutrient pollution can cause dead zones on the bottom of the Great Lakes, will cause nuisance algal blooms which wash ashore on beaches, and as mentioned in the State of Michigan reports on this issue – can cause toxic harmful algal blooms of the same kind that rendered Toledo's drinking water unsafe for consumption last year (and was recently linked to Alzheimer's disease). We cannot afford to jeopardize the public's natural resources, economic assets, and human health by allowing this.

Net pen fish farming in the Great Lakes poses a real and severe, and unpreventable threat to fish health and disease epidemics. The domestic fish can introduce new diseases to our waters, but also have been found elsewhere in the world, to amplify the naturally present and benign diseases, reintroducing them to wild fish where they are more virulent and damaging. This has been proven out in saltwater net pens, yet freshwater is a far better vector than saltwater for diseases to survive and be transmitted between domestic and wild fish. While the domestic fish can be given vaccines and antibiotics, there are no treatment tools for wild fish populations. We will suffer the losses.

Net pen fish farms annually lose large numbers of their domestic fish, and these numbers grow exponentially when large storm events cause catastrophic net failures. These fish are nothing like their wild counterparts. They have been bred and modified for survival in feed lots – not survival in the wild. Yet with the large number of escapes, sufficient numbers go forth to interbreed with our wild fish and deteriorate their ability to survival. These farms want to raise rainbow trout – putting Michigan's world-renowned steelhead fishery (migratory rainbow trout) in direct threat.

If you are interested in learning more about this topic, and our policies on it, our website holds links to numerous valuable pieces of relevant information;  
<http://www.michigantu.org/index.php/michigan-tu-contacts-2/michigan-tu-contacts-4/wild-fisheries-conservation/aquaculture-development> .

House Bill 5255 specifically addresses the issue of commercial net pen fish farming, giving it a clear definition in statute, and speaking clearly and affirmatively on it, prohibiting it. Michigan needs to speak clearly on this and ensure it protects its valuable public resources and economic assets. This state has spent considerable time investigating this form of aquaculture recently. We've learned that it can't be done without causing great damage to things we all are currently dependent on, whether that be recreational fishing economies, clean beaches, high-quality aesthetics for tourism, or safe and dependable drinking water supplies. This industry will be making similar proposals in other Great Lakes states, and those states will look back to Michigan for leadership on this issue. We must affirmatively and visibly conclude on this issue by clearly addressing it in statute. HB5255 provides that clarity and leadership. We support HB5255 and encourage you to do the same with your committee vote.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bryan Burroughs". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bryan" and last name "Burroughs" clearly distinguishable.

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